

CONDITION OF CHILDREN IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

This section of the report provides a quick statistical summary of Miami-Dade County children and their families as a means of better gauging their quality of life. A number of educational, economic, social, and health related indicators are presented using the most recent data available. When relevant, these local statistics are compared to state and federal data and background information. Information in this report was derived from several sources, including the latest U.S. Census (2000), academic studies, and data collected by local, state, and federal agencies and local stakeholders.

Population and Family Characteristics

Since the 1920s, Florida has remained one of the fastest growing states in the nation¹. Florida trails behind only the states of California, Texas, and New York in population growth. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Florida's 2002 population estimate was 16,713,149². According to the 2000 Census, Miami-Dade County's total population was 2,253,362 in 2000 and projected to be 2,363,600 in 2004, an estimated increase of almost 500,000 since 1990.

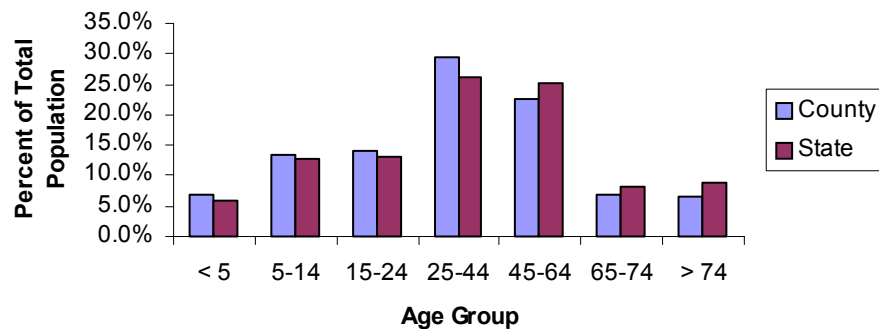
Immigration accounted for 33 percent of the Florida's overall population increase during the past decade. Compared to the national average of 11 percent, foreign-born residents accounted for 16.7 percent of Florida's total population. An even higher percentage (31 percent or 4,637,000 people) of Floridians are immigrants or the children of immigrants. In 2000, it was recorded that 1,147,765 foreign-born residents resided in the Miami-Dade County area³, indicating that immigration accounted directly for 86.4 percent of the overall population increase in Miami-Dade County. In 2000, 49.7 percent of Miami-Dade County's children were of Hispanic decent. The second largest group of children was African-American at 25.7 percent, followed by White, at 21.6 percent.

Among people at least 5 years old living in Miami-Dade County in 2003, 70 percent spoke a language other than English at home⁴. Of those speaking a language other than English at home, 89 percent spoke Spanish, 11 percent spoke some other language, and 49 percent reported that they did not speak English "very well."

In 2003, there were 786,000 households in Miami-Dade County⁵ with an average household size of three people. Families made up 70 percent of the households in Miami-Dade County that year. This figure includes both traditional families (46 percent) and extended families (24 percent). Non-family households made up 30 percent of all households in Miami-Dade County. Grandparents served as caregivers for their grandchildren in 32.8 percent of households in 2000 according to the U.S. Census from that year.

The 2000 Census also indicated that Miami-Dade County children (0-19 years) comprised more than one quarter (27.5 percent) of the total population. Children have traditionally been viewed as one of the most vulnerable and at-risk groups of the general population.

Population Estimates by Age Group, County and State, 2004



Selected Quality of Life Indicators

Poverty

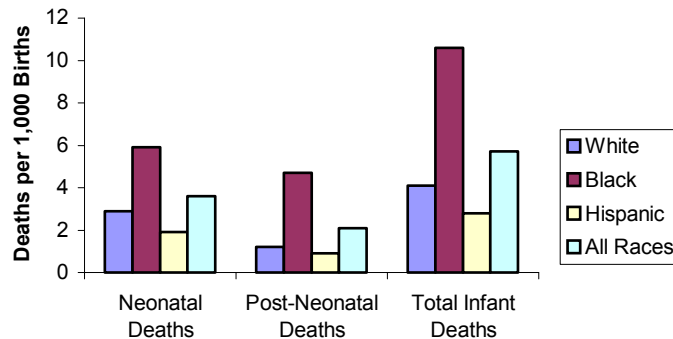
The median income of Miami-Dade County households increased by about \$9,300 in Miami-Dade County from 2000 to 2002 to approximately \$36,089⁶. However, this income level is relatively low compared to state and national levels. Eighty-one percent of households received earnings, 27 percent received Social Security, and eight percent of households received retirement income other than Social Security.

Despite income gains in recent years, a high proportion of people and children live in single-family households with incomes below the poverty level, and a high percentage of residents are still receiving public assistance. In 2003, 18 percent of people in Miami-Dade County were below the federal poverty level⁷. Twenty-four percent of children under the age of 18 were below the poverty level, compared with 23 percent of people 65 years old and over. Fifteen percent of all families, and 33 percent of families with a female head of household and no husband present, had incomes below the poverty level⁷. Despite the high level of families and children living under the poverty level, employment has improved locally from 6.0 percent in 2003 to 4.3 percent in 2005. For comparison, the statewide unemployment levels dropped from 5.3% in 2003 to 3.8% in 2005 and national unemployment levels were 6.0% in 2003 and 5.1% in 2005⁸.

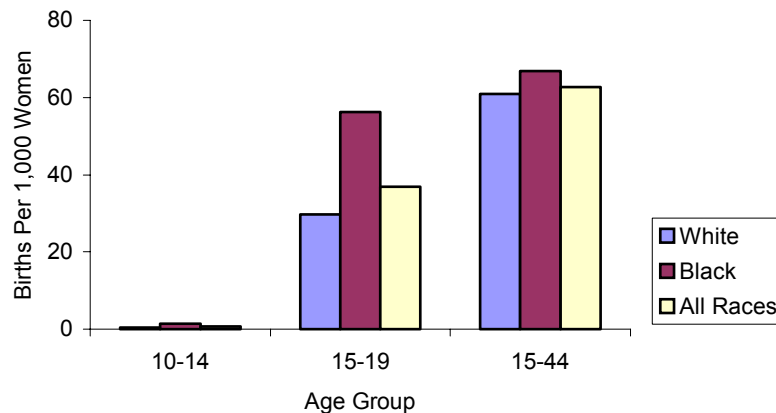
Health

Infant mortality is an index used around the world to assess the overall health of a nation's children. There were 3.6 neonatal infant deaths per 1000 live births and 2.1 post-neonatal deaths per 1000 live births in Miami-Dade County from 2002-2004 compared to a State neonatal level of 4.8 deaths and a postnatal rate of 2.6⁹. Females between the ages of 15 and 19 accounted for 23,580 or 36.9 percent of all births in 2003 and mothers between the ages of 10 and 14 accounted for 0.7 births per 1,000. The charts below show differences in birth and death rates based on race and ethnicity.

Infant Deaths per 1,000 Live Births
Miami-Dade County 2002 - 2004



Number of Births per 1,000 Women
in Miami-Dade County 2002 - 2004



Teenage childbearing presents many potential adverse health effects (e.g. birth defects, infant mortality, and premature births) for teen mothers and their families. Children born to teen mothers are also at higher risk of poverty, low educational attainment, behavioral problems, early sexual activity, and some research has suggested HIV/AIDS. Studies also show that children born to teenage parents are more likely to become teenage parents themselves, thereby perpetuating the cycle of negative consequences.

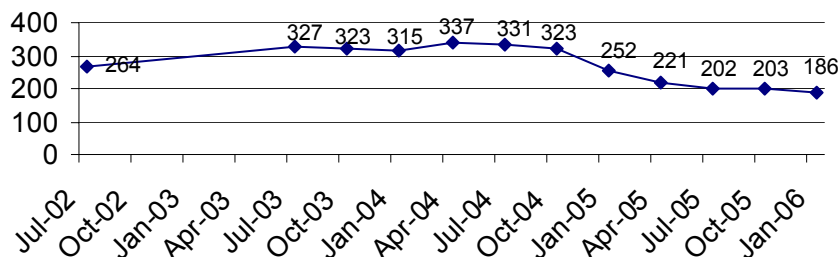
Lack of early and consistent prenatal care is associated with low-birth weight babies and negatively impacts on the learning ability of children. From 2002 to 2004, 88.5 percent of Miami-Dade mothers began prenatal care within the first trimester of pregnancy, continuing a positive trend dating back to 1989. Disparities in access to prenatal care between white mothers and black and Hispanic mothers have also narrowed since 1989. The percentage of black mothers who initiated first trimester prenatal care was 80.2 percent from 2002 to 2004, compared to 91.4 percent for white mothers and 90.9 for Hispanic mothers. Unfortunately for mothers in their teens, 33 percent

received no early prenatal care in 2003. From 2002-04, Miami-Dade County was almost 5 percent above the State average for the number of mothers receiving pre-natal care in the first trimester and also slightly better (8.4 percent) than the State average (8.5 percent) for the number of babies born with low birth weights.

More than 450,000 of Miami-Dade's residents do not have health insurance -- one out of every five people in the county. In Miami-Dade, 30 percent of Hispanics, 25 percent of Blacks, and 39 percent of people of other ethnicities lack health insurance. Of the uninsured, 120,000 are children. Children ages 0 to 9 represented 21.2 percent of the children without health insurance. These statistics are of concern, especially considering a recent national health survey which indicated that nine million (12.8 percent) children in the United States presently have a special health care need.

KidCare, a state supported health insurance program for children, has seen a decrease in the number of children enrolled as shown in the graph below¹⁰. Enrollment has dropped due to a lack of funding.

Florida KidCare Enrollment 2002-2006
(in thousands)

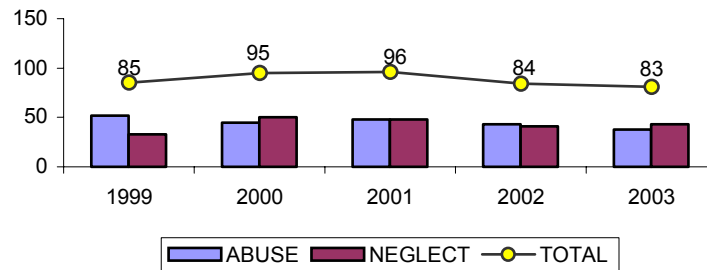


Rates of childhood immunization are one measure of the extent to which children are protected from serious preventable diseases that killed or disabled many children in past decades. The Health Department reports that in 2003, 90.5 percent of children under the age of 2 in Miami-Dade County had received the recommended immunizations in comparison to 72.8 percent of the children in 2001¹¹.

Child Welfare

In 2003, Florida received 248,702 total reports of child abuse and neglect. Of these 157,474 incidents were referred for more detailed investigation. In 2003, 83 children died as a result of abuse or neglect across Florida. The chart below shows the trend for the past five years. In Miami-Dade County, reported incidents of abuse and neglect have remained relatively constant for the past two years. In FY 2003-04, Miami-Dade received 13,992 reports of abuse and neglect and in FY 2004-05 a total of 14,001 reports. In Miami-Dade County approximately 10 children a year die from abuse or neglect.

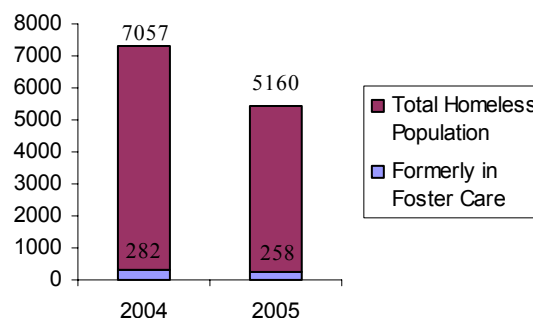
State of Florida Child Deaths (1999-2003)



In Miami-Dade County, the management of the foster care system has transitioned from the State Department of Children and Families to Our Kids, Inc., a non-profit organization. A March 2006 report by Florida TaxWatch indicated that the move to non-profit managed systems has resulted in some success. Improvements included increased parental visitation, fewer children in care, fewer children re-entering foster care, more children being adopted, and less foster home crowding. In Miami-Dade, the number of children in foster care went from 5,911 in FY 2003-04 to 4,822 in FY 2004-05.

There are no specific statistics for Miami-Dade County regarding how many youth transitioning to adulthood become homeless, but the Homeless Trust has been tracking these statistics for youth who have been part of the foster care system. The chart below shows that the homeless population declined from 2004 to 2005 as did the number of ex-foster care youths who became homeless. Further tracking and assessment are needed, but initiatives targeting these populations appear to be working.

Homeless Individuals who were Formerly in Foster Care

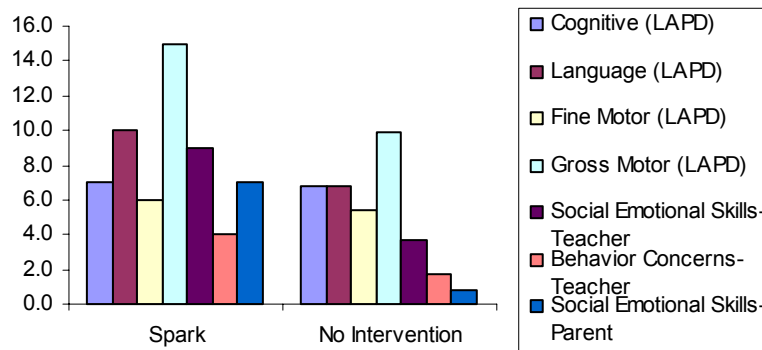


School Readiness

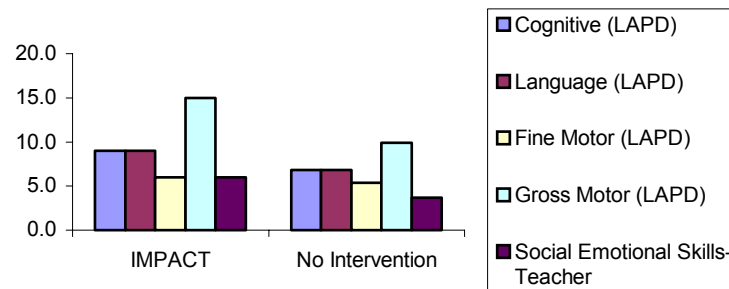
The preparation of children prior to kindergarten is mostly charged to the Early Learning Coalition, a school readiness coalition coordinated by the State of Florida's Office of Early Learning. The early childhood years are the most important for creating the framework and laying the foundation for a child's academic, social, and behavioral competence. For this reason, early identification of children in need of additional assistance is critical.

The graphs below demonstrate how early intervention programs can benefit children in Miami-Dade County. Assessments performed on different sets of children showed that those enrolled in child care centers that implemented early intervention SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) and IMPACT (Innovative Model of Preschool Achievement through Collaborative Teaching) programs, made gains in every skill measurement, most strikingly in gross motor skills and social emotional skills. (The assessment tool used was the Learning Assessment Profile-Diagnostic or LAP-D.)

Gains Among Children at SPARK Centers Compared to Children with No Intervention 2002-2005



Gains Among Children at IMPACT Centers Compared to Children with No Intervention 2002 - 2005

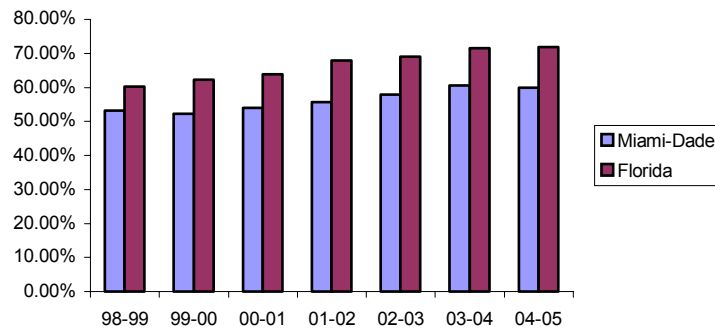


Education

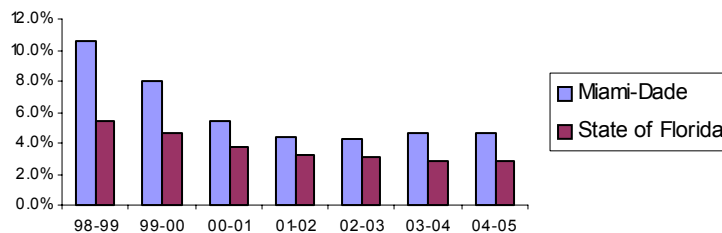
The education of school-age children in Miami-Dade County is largely under the auspices of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), the fourth largest school system in the U. S. with 433 schools¹². The total public school enrollment in Miami-Dade County was 647,000 in 2003. Pre-primary school enrollment was 87,000 children and elementary, middle, and high school enrollment was 560,000 children. The Florida Department of Education indicates that in school year 2004-05, 59.9 percent of high school students graduated in Miami-Dade County, compared to 71.9 percent statewide¹³. In academic year 2004-05, 4.5 percent of students dropped out of school in Miami-Dade, compared to 3.0 percent statewide¹⁴.

Among people 16 to 19 years old, 7 percent were dropouts (not enrolled in school and had not graduated from high school). While Miami-Dade lags behind the State, there has been an overall positive trend of increased graduation rates since 1998. Although higher than the State rates, dropout rates in Miami-Dade generally appear to be declining. However, a closer look at the Miami-Dade data shows that graduation rates declined during the last academic year and dropout rates increased or stayed the same for the last two academic years; this might be the start of a negative trend and should continue to be monitored closely.

High School Graduation Rate 1998 - 2005

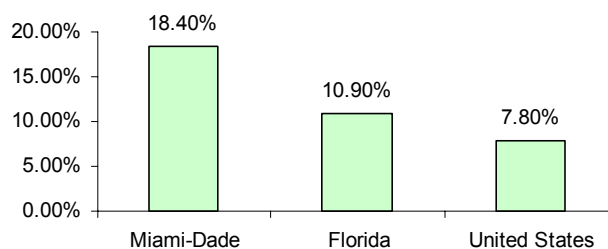


High School Dropout Rate, 1998-2005



During the 2003-04 school year, 18.4 percent of all M-DCPS students had limited English proficiency¹⁵. This is significantly higher than Florida's percentage of 10.9 percent and higher than the U.S. average of 7.8 percent.

Proportion of Children with Limited English Proficiency, 2003-2004

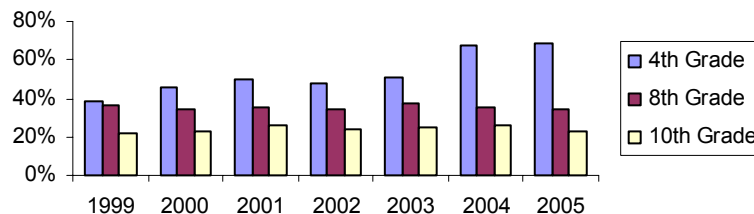


In 2003, 75 percent of people 25 years or older had at least graduated from high school and 26 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher.

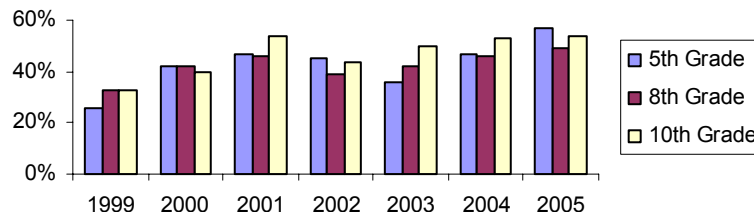
During the 2003–04 and 2004–05 academic years, M-DCPS students in grades three through ten scored lower than the state average on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in both Mathematics and Reading, at every grade level¹⁶. The charts below show how children in Miami-Dade have performed on the FCAT Reading and Math tests over the last seven years.

Despite being lower than the State average, fourth grade reading scores have shown distinct improvements and math scores demonstrate an upward trend for all grade levels from 2003 to 2005.

FCAT-READING
Percent of Miami-Dade Students Scoring at a Satisfactory Level (level 3) or Above

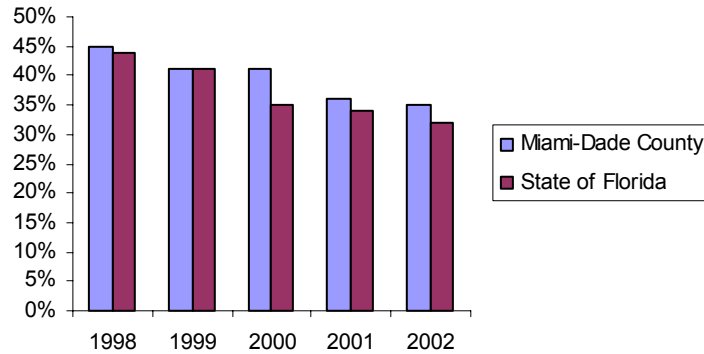


FCAT-MATH
Percent of Miami-Dade Students Scoring at a Satisfactory Level (level 3) or Above

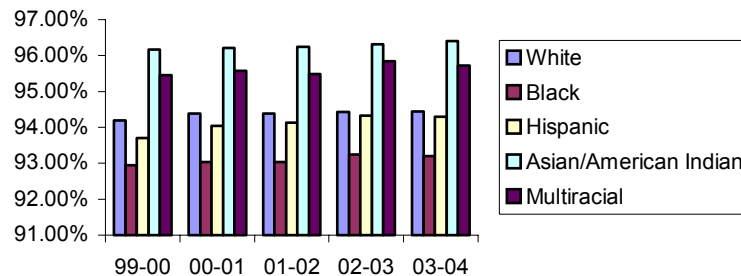


As far as attendance rates are concerned, Miami-Dade appears to be doing better compared to statewide rates, however, data collected Miami-Dade County Public Schools show that overall attendance levels have been dropping. Data on the ethnicity of children attending school shows that White, Black, and Hispanic students have far worse attendance rates compared to Asian/American Indian and multiethnic children, but that these attendance rates have held relatively constant.

Good Attendance Rates
Percent of Students who are Absent 10 Days
or Less per School Year



Student Attendance by Race/Ethnicity
(as a percentage of student membership)*
1999 - 2004



Juvenile Justice

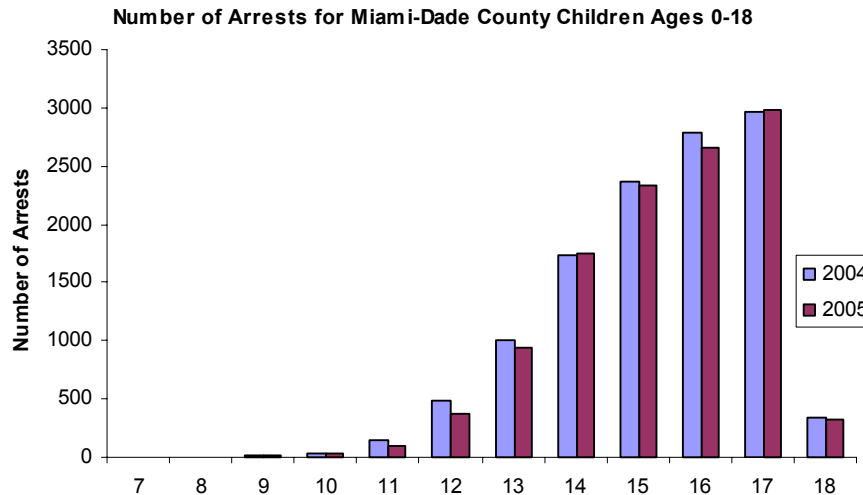
Numerous studies have shown that there is a link between school truancy and juvenile delinquency. Florida law defines a "habitual truant" as a student who has 15 or more unexcused absences within 90 calendar days, with or without the knowledge or consent of the student's parent or guardian. During the 2002-03 school year, 5.9 percent of students in Miami-Dade County were considered habitual truants (21 or more unexcused absences during the school year)¹⁷.

The Juvenile Services Department continues to operate as the centralized processing, referral, and evaluation center for arrested youth in Miami-Dade County. Arrest data from FY 2004-05 has yielded the following information¹⁸:

- A statistical downward trend of arrests is evident.
- Males are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested than females; males comprise 78 percent of the total arrest population while females comprise 22 percent of the population.
- Though arrested considerably less than males, females are a growing proportion of the juvenile justice population.

- Miami-Dade County law enforcement agencies' arrests included two percent involving youth 12 and under; the remaining 98 percent were 13 and older.
- Juvenile arrests disproportionately involve minorities, with African-American youth as the highest of all ethnic groups reported. This applies in particular to black males, who represent over 39 percent of the overall arrest population.

As shown by the chart below, overall juvenile arrests in the County have shown a slight decline from 2004 to 2005 for children of most ages. Further tracking and analysis of these trends will have to be conducted to assess whether these reductions are a result of early prevention and intervention programs. On a negative note, the Juvenile Courts are being challenged by an increase in the proportion of younger aged delinquents coming before them. Because youth referred to juvenile court before the age of 13 are far more likely to become chronic juvenile offenders than youth whose initial contact occurs at a later age, there is reason for concern over the growing number of younger delinquents.



Summary

Challenges

Economic data point to a community in stress. This is of concern, since poverty strongly influences other quality of life indicators. Median household income levels in Miami-Dade are relatively low compared to state and national levels and the unemployment rate of Miami-Dade County was also higher than state and national rates. One clear indication of poverty is the inability of community members to purchase health insurance. As was detailed before, one out of every five people in Miami-Dade County does not have health insurance and 27 percent of the uninsured are children. The decreases in access to health insurance will have long-term effects on the health of our community. High levels of teenage pregnancy in our community are another health-related concern since children born to teen mothers suffer from higher levels of birth defects, infant mortality, and premature births and are also associated with higher levels of poverty, low educational attainment, behavioral problems, early sexual activity, and perhaps HIV/AIDS.

Children in our community are also doing poorly in school. In the 2004-05 school year, as in the 2003-04 school year, Miami-Dade County Public Schools' students scored lower than the State average on the FCAT Reading and Mathematics test at every grade level. More Miami-Dade students dropped out of high school and fewer students graduated compared to statewide averages. Declining attendance rates also point to academic problems.

Progress

Further tracking and assessment are needed, but initiatives targeting at-risk populations appear to be working. The homeless population, including homeless families, has declined by over 1,800 individuals, including the number of prior foster care youths who became homeless. The number of children in foster care also declined by over 1,000 children, despite population growth. Reported incidents of abuse and neglect have remained relatively constant over the last two years. Along with these encouraging signs, juvenile arrest rates have shown a decline (although younger children and girls are a growing proportion of the total number of arrests).

Recent studies assessing early intervention programs indicate that these local initiatives are having a significant effect on improving the readiness of our children as they enter the school system. Rates of childhood immunization for younger children have also dramatically improved to a level of 90 percent in 2003. Educational initiatives aimed at older children seem to be having success, too. Although Miami-Dade County scores still fall below State averages, dramatic improvements have been made in FCAT reading scores at the fourth grade level and FCAT math scores have improved from 2003 to 2005 for all grade levels.

Opportunities

In its entirety, the content of this report is expected to help service providers make effective, factually-based decisions and formulate successful long term policies as they move toward the following general goals:

- Creating a broad community-wide strategy to address health and well-being issues facing children and their families;
- Recognizing the manner in which poverty influences many other quality of life indicators;
- Implementing programs that help to reduce the long-term need for services while at the same time increasing access to services for children and families that need these services;
- Understanding the cultural diversity of the community in order to develop programs and policies that are more effective and culturally welcoming;
- Improving information sharing to avoid duplication and facilitate coordination of services across providers;
- Investing in training, support, and mentoring of service providers to increase the use of best practices developed through scientific study and professional consensus; and
- Emphasizing the necessity of using professionally-acceptable, widely-used assessment tools to measure the success of any service being provided.

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